

Archived Information

Interim Evaluation of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory Synthesis Report

I. Brief Overview of the Laboratory

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) has been in existence since June, 1966. The states in SEDL's region have changed somewhat over the past 33 years; currently, the Laboratory serves five states: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. In combination the schools in these states enroll some of the most economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse students in the nation. Louisiana and Arkansas have substantial African-American populations, New Mexico and Oklahoma have substantial Hispanic populations, and Oklahoma and New Mexico have substantial Native American Indian populations. In an attempt to properly serve this region, the Board of Directors has charged the Laboratory to focus on five concentrations: rural, urban, the delta, the border area, and the Native American Indian Nations.

In November, 1995, SEDL was awarded a five-year, \$22.2 million Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) contract from Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U. S. Department of Education. Six programmatic goals were identified:

1. Enhancing family and community involvement in education;
2. Addressing diversity in language and culture;
3. Aligning and supporting policy development;
4. Promoting instructional coherence;
5. Applying technology to restructuring and learning;
6. Changing the organization and management of schooling.

Within the current contract SEDL has identified “addressing diversity in language and culture” (Goal 2) as its “specialty area.” In addition, for the purposes of the interim evaluation, two “signature programs” were identified. The first, the Technical Assistance Program (TAP), is associated with Goal 5. The second, the Collaborative Action Team (CAT) Program, is connected with Goal 1.

The primary work of SEDL is research, development, and dissemination (RDD), now conceptualized as an integrated effort, typically involving a field-based research and development process. The centerpiece of most RDD projects is professional and community development: to change teacher practice, to create professional learning communities, and to enhance family and community active engagement in education. A key feature of this research and development process is co-development with practitioners at the intensive field sites. The use of co-developers is a core strategy for promoting scale-up of initiatives and program models, a key element of dissemination.

At present, SEDL employs 100 staff members: 20 in clerical, secretarial, and technical positions; 38 in professional positions; and 41 in supervisory or director positions. Seventy percent are White, 19 percent are Hispanic, eight percent are Black, and the remaining three percent are Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American Indian, or Alaskan native. Seventy-one percent are female. There has been a substantial turnover in the last two years, with over 30 departures and about 50 new hires. An intensive program review and restructuring occurred in 1997 (see discussion below) and resulted in many philosophical, organizational, and programmatic changes. A new position of Chief Operating Officer (COO) was created to have a full-time person as director of the REL contract. Some staff members were moved to different positions. At present, two key management positions remain vacant.

SEDL is governed by a 20-member Board of Directors, with four members from each state in the region, including the Chief State School Officer or designee. The full board meets twice a year.

The Phase III standards, approved in 1998, mandate that each Laboratory will undergo a peer review process during the third year of the present funding cycle. The purpose of the review is to assess the performance of the Laboratory over the first three contract years and to guide program improvements during the remainder of the contract term. One component of the process, considered an “interim assessment” or formative evaluation, is a site visit. The SEDL site visit took place from May 10 - May 14, 1999. The assigned panel consisted of Lorin Anderson, a college professor and panel chair; Wesley Boykin, a research and evaluation specialist; Pi Irwin, a school district superintendent; Sherry Lovelace, a senior program therapist; John McFadden, a college professor; and Sheila Rosenblum, an independent evaluation and policy researcher.

In preparation for the site visit, the panelists reviewed multiple operational documents and a large sample of program-related materials. On site, panelists reviewed additional materials and attended scheduled presentations and briefings. They also conducted interviews with the CEO, COO, the OERI program officer, several Board members, the directors and staff members associated with the specialty area and the two signature programs, “clients” of the two signature programs, and directors of two of the other four programs/goal areas.

II. Implementation and Management

A. To what extent is the REL doing what it was approved to do during the first three contract years?

1. Strengths

Overall SEDL has conducted activities in a timely manner according to their contract and modifications. A review of the Updated Annual Plan and Budget of the Third Year indicated some significant changes in a number of areas. Examples include discontinuing the Educator Exchange Program,

revising a project to link existing community development efforts to the school and moving it from Goal 6 to Goal 1 where it complements the CAT model for building community-school partnerships, refocusing the direction SEDL was taking with respect to Charter Schools, and redesigning the scope of Goal 5, Applying technology to restructuring and learning.

One of the major strengths is the presence of able and visionary leadership. Shortly after the current REL contract was awarded, the then-CEO announced his retirement. Following a national search, the current CEO, who had worked at SEDL for 26 years, was hired. Shortly after his appointment in 1997 and with the support of the Board of Directors, the current CEO initiated a major internal review of all SEDL programs. This was followed by a compensation study in response to Board concerns that SEDL was “too top-heavy” in administration.

As a result of the internal review and compensation study, a major restructuring effort was completed of programs and staff positions. This effort has enabled SEDL leadership to begin to realize its vision as a client-responsive, future-oriented organization. This vision is in sharp contrast to that of the former CEO whom is quoted as saying that his purpose was “to keep the ship from going down on my watch.” The comprehensive internal review, then, although disruptive of the work schedule of the original contract, is an indication of visionary leadership within the organization.

A second strength is the presence of sound management structures and communication systems. One area that has been modified under the new SEDL leadership is the role and responsibilities of the Board of Directors. In order to get board members more involved in the work of SEDL and enhance their capacity to advise the staff, the current CEO asked each board member to choose one of the six goal areas for a more intensive examination. Board members were invited to “research” the goal area, visit sites, and, at the end of a specified period of time, make presentations of their findings to the full board. Overall,

the relationship between the Board of Directors and SEDL appears to be excellent.

Two management councils – one for SEDL as an organization, the other for the REL – have been established. Both meet twice monthly, the first focusing on the overall management of the organization and the second focusing specifically on the work pertaining to REL contract. Task forces are established to address specific issues or problems (e.g., the compensation study, facilities remodeling, and the performance appraisal system).

A new bi-monthly publication, *SEDL Links*, has been designed to inform board members, staff, and other key communicators of SEDL's work. Electronic communication, including e-mail and internet access, ensures prompt and accurate information exchange among staff members.

A third strength is SEDL's intensive focus on its identified client populations. SEDL directs resources, both financial and personnel, effectively to those populations targeted for REL assistance. In this regard, SEDL's particular emphasis is on ensuring educational equality for children and youth who live in poverty; who are Hispanic, African-American, or other minorities; or who have mental or physical exceptionalities. Although Texas includes one-half of the students and three-fourths of the teachers in SEDL's region, resources are distributed to those areas most in need, including the border area of Texas, the delta region of Arkansas and Mississippi, and Native American Indians living on reservations. Finally, when screening sites for selection as "intensive implementation sites," SEDL staff members attempt to ensure those schools and districts with greatest need are chosen.

2. Issues and Recommendations

The major issue that needs to be addressed is the vacant leadership positions in the organization. Specifically, two leadership positions remain vacant: the program manager for REL Goal 2 and SEDL's specialty area, language and culture diversity, and the program manager for the Office of

Evaluation and Policy Studies. Prior to the reorganization of SEDL, responsibilities for evaluation and responsibilities for policy studies were in two different areas. As part of the reorganization, these responsibilities were combined in a single area. It is this area that has the vacant leadership position.

SEDL's executive leadership acknowledges the importance of both positions. Moreover, they are critically aware of the need for leadership in language and cultural diversity for **this** Laboratory in **this** region. Thus, these positions should be filled as soon as possible.

A second issue is the reliance on Federal funding. At present (and for the past several years) more than 98 percent of the total funding for the Laboratory comes from government sources. At a Board meeting held within the past year, a concern for diversification of funding was expressed. Additionally, a goal for the year 2000 was set: 70 percent federal and state sources, 15 percent philanthropic sources, and 15 percent market sources. SEDL should make every effort to actively pursue additional sources of funding to lessen the reliance on the REL contract and the U. S. Department of Education. The panel believes that increasing the diversity of funding may increase the overall capacity of SEDL, adding resources in support of the programs and goals included in the REL contract.

A third issue is insufficient collaboration across programs and goal areas. There seems to be minimal collaboration or consultation within SEDL except on an informal basis and, then, only when an individual staff member takes the initiative. Although such informal communication does take place, it may be more appropriate to change the organizational culture by initiating more structured interaction opportunities. In this regard, the language and cultural diversity philosophy underlying Goal 2 and SEDL's specialty area should be infused throughout the Laboratory; from the conception of every program to product development to hiring practices and to all interaction that occurs internally and external to the Laboratory. For SEDL to be maximally effective and efficient, it needs to be more than the sum of its parts.

B. To what extent is the REL using a self-monitoring process to plan and adapt activities in response to feedback and customer needs?

1. Strengths

SEDL recognizes the critical need to monitor its services and products in order to optimize its value to the region. *A major strength, discussed earlier, is the conduct of the internal review process that led to restructuring.*

A second strength is the use of a quality assurance (QA) process within the Laboratory. SEDL's QA process, described in its original proposal, was fully implemented as of March, 1996. QA activities have been documented in each of SEDL's quarterly progress reports since that time. As of February, 1999, a total of 98 reviews of 77 unique products had been conducted. Workshop and conference plans and agendas, invitations to schools and communities to apply for participation in specific developmental efforts, booklets, videos, and web-based products all were reviewed during this period.

If there is disagreement in the review process, a facilitator attempts to resolve the conflict. If the conflict remains unresolved, the issue is referred to the REL Management Team. If it continues, the COO resolves the conflict. According to the executive leadership, such conflicts rarely occur.

Finally, the QA process allows for external review. The decision as to whether external review is necessary is made by the appropriate program manager.

A third strength is the use of feedback from clients and customers to improve the quality of products and services. The TAP and "Organizing for Diversity" programs incorporated pilot tests in their developmental processes. Changes in the programs were made based on the results of the pilot tests. SEDL sends out evaluation surveys to clients and customers who have been the recipients of products and

services. The data obtained from these surveys are published annually.

2. Issues and Recommendations

At present, as mentioned above, external review is an optional part of the QA process. *The panel believes that external review should be an integral, required part of the QA process.* These external reviewers should be included at both early and later stages of the developmental process, particularly when major projects and/or products are being designed and implemented. Over the years, the Institutional Review Team (IRT) has been reduced from three to one (through resignation or death). A fully-functioning IRT would be an asset to SEDL.

A second issue is a lack of a coherent, comprehensive data base that transcends individual goals and programs, thus enabling one to better understand SEDL as a whole. This data base would include “universal” data regarding quality assurance and other pertinent evaluation issues that cut across goals and programs. Such a data base would likely support opportunities to share work across goals and programs and would help to determine when integrating projects at various sites may be useful or advantageous.

A third issue, mentioned earlier, is the vacancy in the evaluation position. We mention it again here because it impacts directly on the first two issues (above).

III. Quality

A. To what extent is the REL developing high quality products and services?

1. Strengths

SEDL is developing high quality products and services in several areas. The panel believes that the quality depends in large part on the field-based development and the assistance SEDL provides those on-site. A major indicator of the quality of the CAT and TAP programs is the testimonies given to the panel by those participating in the programs. All stated that the products and services have had a great impact within the education setting in which they work; they further stated that the products and services should be continued and, if possible, expanded.

Product and service development typically begins with a review of literature. Thus, development is guided by a strong knowledge base, both in terms of what should be delivered and how it should be delivered. An internal review as part of the aforementioned QA process enhances the quality of products and services. Pilot tests and field tests are an integral part of the developmental process, as is the presence and use of co-developers. *In summary, the developmental model is exemplary field-based R & D.*

A second strength is the selection criteria used to intensive implementation sites. SEDL has identified factors that must be in place for successful design and implementation of site-based projects. Commitment to and accountability for successful implementation has become a shared responsibility of SEDL staff and administrators and teachers in the field, particularly the co-developers. In this way, the likelihood of success is increased and the probability of failure caused by factors over which SEDL has no control is reduced. In addition, this site selection supports SEDL in its efforts to build capacity without projects to enable sites to sustain successful implementation when direct support from SEDL is no longer available.

A good example of site-selection criteria comes from the TAP Program. In order to participate, sites must have had in place (1) a committed leadership and teaching staff, (2) adequate technology, and (3) a willingness to implement student-centered learning environments.

A third strength is SEDL's efforts at tailoring products and services to the intended audiences. SEDL carefully distinguishes among and attends to the different audiences and different purposes for their products (e.g., those for training, those for information dissemination, those for use as resource materials). Revisions based on the results of pilot and field tests often lead to site-specific modifications that increase the likelihood that the programs will be implemented successfully.

2. Issues and Recommendations

Two of the aforementioned strengths may, in fact, be double-edged swords. Specifically, although site-selection criteria may increase the success of the developmental phase of the RDD process, it may undermine the success of the dissemination phase. Similarly, although tailoring products and services to individual sites is responsive to client needs, it requires greater expertise. Thus, the applicability of the products and services to sites without such expertise would be limited. *In summary, then, customized models may restrict generalizability and scaling up efforts.*

At present, a variety of data on each project is being collected. The data include journal records, field notes, classroom observations, self-assessments, anecdotal records, and student success data. However, these data are not yet compiled and organized in such a way to be available for use in the field. Furthermore, the available student success data are somewhat limited. The vast majority of the clients interviewed during the site visit expressed a need for more in the way of student success data. *SEDL should place greater emphasis on securing student success/impact data and organizing the data in a meaningful and usable way.* [The issue of student success/impact data is mentioned several times in

our report. The panel members understand that the major thrust of SEDL's work is professional and/or community development (see Section VA). However, there is a long-term need to evaluate school, community, and teacher development in terms of the influence on students.]

A third issue is the possible duplication of effort in program and product development. Each product and service seems to be developed “from scratch,” based primarily on a literature review. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts, literature reviews are generally incomplete. An example is the *Native Education Resources for the Southwest Region* publication. Two excellent resources were missing: the Southwest Indian Polytech Institute (SIPI) programs and an early childhood program that services only Pueblo families with younger children (Native American Pueblo Parent Resources). The isolation between goals and programs within SEDL seems to extend beyond SEDL in terms of other Laboratories, research centers, and the like. In contrast, one noteworthy effort consistent with this recommendation is the attempt to adapt comprehensive school reform models for Hispanic English language learners. A greater effort should be made in coordinating development efforts with others in the field working in similar areas or on similar problems.

A final issue concerns the lack of diversity of SEDL staff. One important element in designing and delivering products and services to the targeted audiences is the credibility of the designer or “deliverer.” Part of the credibility comes from the “sameness” in terms of ethnic or linguistic group membership. Thus, we recommend that every effort be made to increase the diversity of SEDL staff to ensure that all audiences being served have adequate representation.

IV. Utility

A. To what extent are the products and services provided by SEDL useful to and used by customers?

1. Strengths

Testimonials by the users of CAT and TAP were very supportive of the products and services related to these two signature programs. For example, those using TAP stated they could see significant academic improvements in their students in the program when they were compared with students in more traditional programs. Greater enthusiasm on the part of the students was also reported, as was more creativity in teaching on the part of the teachers.

All clients interviewed appreciated the follow-through assistance provided by SEDL staff as well as the scope of the relationship with SEDL staff members. Statements such as “they gave us direction,” “they helped us develop a vision for our school,” they had an impact on the quality of instruction and collaboration among teachers that aroused interest of others because of the excitement of students and teachers” attest to the impact SEDL has had in the intensive implementation sites.

Furthermore, the results of the surveys indicate that more than 80 percent of clients reported that the Laboratory products and services were useful in enhancing their knowledge, skills, and professional work. *In a phrase, one major strength of SEDL is they have “satisfied customers.”*

A second strength is related to the first. *SEDL is responsive to its clients.* They respond to suggestions from the field as to how to improve their products and services. Teachers in the TAP program stated that they had no problem contacting SEDL staff members when needed. They further indicated that SEDL staff can be contacted by regular mail, e-mail, or a toll free telephone number. In almost all instances, their questions were answered or concerns addressed immediately or in a very short period of

time.

A third strength is related to the second. *SEDL has multiple ways of sharing information.* In addition to more traditional publications and workshops, SEDL has an active web site that features all programs and services. They monitor the web site for the number of “hits” on a regular basis.

The combination of traditional publications, the web site, LISTSERVs, and e-mail increases the opportunities that all educators in the region have to access SEDL’s products and services.

2. Issues and Recommendations

A first issue was mentioned in conjunction with the previous question. *This issue is the need for SEDL to respond to client requests for student success/impact data.* According to the clients interviewed, the need for such data is a “fact of life” in today’s world. Such data would enable them to secure additional support for the SEDL programs and services, both political support and financial support.

The type of data that is gathered should be aligned with the intended impact of the various programs and services **on students**. For example, one possible impact of the CAT program is increased participation of students in school activities, both academic and otherwise. Thus, increases in student attendance and student participation, or decreases in student disruption or student suspension may be legitimate “success” data. In contrast, the TAP program must ultimately impact on student learning if it is to be judged “successful.” In this regard, “success” data would likely include standardized test scores as well as student performance on more “authentic assessments” (e.g., portfolios of work).

A second issue is the need to align SEDL’s programs and services with state and district initiatives. Clients need to see how the pieces fit together. If there is a lack of “fit,” the SEDL programs will likely suffer because many of the state and district initiatives are “requirements.” SEDL could improve

the utility of its products and services by aligning them with the larger state/district initiatives. SEDL also could support its intent to build local capacity by developing strategies to assist clients in making connections between state/district initiatives and SEDL products and services.

B. To what extent is the REL focused on customer needs?

1. Strengths

The strengths are easy to state: *SEDL staff members are aware of clients' needs and they are very responsive to those needs.* SEDL regularly determines client needs, both formally and informally.

Formally, an extensive needs sensing process is in place. This process is detailed in a series of documents. Results of the needs sensing process are published annually in the *Annual Environmental Scanning Report*.

Informally, SEDL collects data on its on-going interactions with those whom it serves and, when necessary, makes modifications in products and/or services based on those data. As mentioned earlier, SEDL is very client-oriented with respect to its overall operations, its work in intensive implementation sites, and its work with policy makers.

2. Issues and Recommendations

In the words of some Board members, SEDL “needs more visibility. They should know about us.”

One possible reason for this state of affairs is that although SEDL staff are sensitive to the needs of the clients they have identified, they may not be as sensitive to the needs of “clients in general,” including educators in the entire five-state region as well to the needs of the greater R & D community. *SEDL needs to focus more attention on building and disseminating knowledge* in key areas such as language and cultural diversity, comprehensive school improvement, and the creation of technology-rich, constructivist learning environments.

V. Outcomes and Impact

A. To what extent is the REL's work contributing to improved student success, particularly in intensive implementation sites?

1. Strengths

Students lie at the heart of most of SEDL's initiatives. When properly implemented, the TAP results in the creation of student-centered classrooms. The "Organizing for Diversity" program is concerned with the problem of students whose cultural backgrounds differ from the cultural backgrounds of the teachers responsible for teaching them. Finally, the CAT attempts to "give voice to traditionally voiceless people" in the community. Many of these are parents, although some are students. *All of these issues, not only have students at their center, but are of national significance.*

A second strength is that SEDL collects data directly related to the purposes and goals of their programs and services. Perhaps the best example is the "Organizing for Diversity" program. Baseline data are collected on the four major components: cultural knowledge, self-awareness, communication skills, and beliefs). Following this, a year-long series of professional development seminars are conducted, one per month. Data on the same four components are then collected at the end of the year. Other examples include the field notes and observations of the TAP program, and the extensive CAT self-assessment instrument.

A third strength is the presence of comprehensive evaluation plans for each of the projects associated with each of the six goals. The plans include project objectives, anticipated audience outcomes, evaluation questions, evaluation methods, and tentative time requirements. All plans are based on a formal knowledge utilization framework (i.e., awareness, planning for use, entry-level use, and advanced-level use).

2. Issues and Recommendations

While agreeing that student success was important, the CEO suggested on multiple occasions that the primary emphasis of SEDL has been and will continue to be community and teacher professional development. Although the panel believed that the programs and services **could potentially lead** to improved student success, there was a concern that insufficient attention was being paid to documenting improved student success. Stated somewhat differently, although it is expected that students should be more successful as a result of participating in SEDL's programs, student success should not be assumed; rather, it must be directly determined. *Thus, SEDL must maintain vigilance in collecting and analyzing student success data.*

It is unlikely that SEDL has sufficient resources to collect and analyze student success data at every site for every program. Thus, the panel recommends that *SEDL should assist personnel on-site in the identification of relevant data, the collection and analysis of those data, the interpretation of the data, and the use of the data to make informed decisions about programs and, ultimately, about students.* In some cases, SEDL will likely need to build local capacity in this area.

Not all programs and services have equal potential of impacting directly on students. Rather, the programs seem to exist along a continuum of direct student impact. For example, the TAP program has a reasonable likelihood of directly impact student success because students are directly involved. In contrast, the "Organizing for Diversity" program may impact on student success, but the impact would be indirect because of its focus on teachers. Finally, the CAT program is the least likely to have a direct impact on students; its impact on students would be limited to changes in schools and classrooms that would result from efforts made by those participating in the CAT program. *Because of these differences, an overall evaluation plan (in addition to the goal-by-goal plans that exist) should be prepared.*

One final comment about the evaluation plans is in order. The evaluation questions included in the written plans did not match the research questions we were given during the oral presentations. To the extent that such a “mismatch” exists, the validity of the data obtained from the evaluations is open to question.

B. To what extent does the Laboratory assist states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies?

1. Strengths

Much of SEDL’s work addresses the need to improve education through “whole school” change and improvement. More specifically, SEDL assists states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies in three ways. First, the work done with respect to Goal 3, Aligning and Supporting Policy Development, addresses the need for whole school change (e.g., charter schools). Second, SEDL, through its on-going work with projects such as TAP and CAT, supports and encourages “whole school” improvement in the intensive implementation sites. Third, SEDL has paid attention to issues of “scaling up” its efforts through the training of site-based co-developers. In virtually all cases, these co-developers work with projects that have the potential of impacting on the entire school.

A second strength is the expertise of the Goal 6 staff in assisting state and local personnel in making comprehensive school-wide changes. Goal 6 deals with strategies for increasing school success. Project FIRST and the “Professional Learning Community” Project are approaches to comprehensive school improvement. In addition, SEDL is part of the “School Change Collaborative,” an inter-Laboratory effort led by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Finally, SEDL plans to be involved with at least some of the 250 schools in the five-state region that are expected to receive CSRD awards.

A third strength is the use of the Regional Policy Analysis and Advisors Network to support comprehensive school improvement via the policy arena and the legislative process. SEDL's general approach within this network is to (1) bring together policy makers across the five states on a regular basis, (2) maintain regular communication with them during the interim, using electronic communication as well as more traditional means, and (3) through these meetings and this ongoing communication, attempt to influence policy by providing members of the network with appropriate, accurate, and "research-based" information.

2. Issues and Recommendations

The organization and operation of the Laboratory is somewhat fragmented. Everything seems to be organized around each of the major goals and programs; thus, collaboration of staff members across programs is kept at a minimum. For example, despite the focus on schoolwide improvement, Goal 6 staff members operate in isolation from staff members assigned to the other goals. Similarly, the specialty area, language and cultural diversity, is embedded within a specific goal, rather than being a centerpiece of SEDL that cuts across goal areas. A comprehensive effort at SEDL is needed if they are to impact comprehensive school improvement in the field.

The panel found it somewhat puzzling that a few staff members have a national, even international, reputation, but their expertise is not utilized to the maximum benefit of the Laboratory itself. The lack of cohesiveness and consistent cross-utilization of some exceptional human resources seems to impede the development of an overall exceptional regional Laboratory.

Finally, SEDL needs to concentrate more on ways to scale up their school improvement efforts. It will be extremely important to analyze and document the co-developer model, its strengths and weaknesses, and its potential for promoting scale-up. If the model "works" it will be a major contribution to the field.

C. To what extent has the REL made progress in establishing a regional and national reputation in its specialty area?

1. Strengths

The major strength is that work on the specialty area is ongoing under less than optimal circumstances. Despite the lack of a full-time program manager, several exceptional products have been developed (e.g., *Native Education Resources for the Southwest Region*, *Public Deliberation: A Tool for Connecting School Reform and Diversity*) and a very good program is in the developmental phase (i.e., “Organizing for Diversity”). The panel believes this speaks to the competence and dedication of the staff members associated with the specialty area. The quality of the existing staff is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that the majority of them were initially employed in a training and technical assistance function and are now being asked to engage in an RDD function.

A second strength is that SEDL leadership has abandoned projects in this area that, because of changing external circumstances, are no longer desirable, feasible, or both. An example is the original intent to establish a bi-national school for students crossing daily from Mexico into Texas. As a result of stricter enforcement of border crossing, the students were unable to attend school in Texas and the project became unfeasible.

2. Issues and Recommendations

The major weakness is the lack of a full-time leader for this specialty area. It is imperative that a person with expertise in language and cultural diversity and strong leadership skills be actively sought out and employed as soon as possible.

A second issue is that the specialty area is not synonymous with SEDL at either a regional or national level. SEDL seems to have pulled back from exercising leadership in this area in the cross-

Laboratory collaborative effort. SEDL staff members presented over 200 papers at state, regional, and national conferences; fewer than 10 percent of these were related to the specialty area. Similarly, in a list of 24 staff publications, four were related to the specialty area, none in refereed journals. Every effort must be made to make SEDL a nationally-recognized leader in the field of language and cultural diversity. Consistent with this effort is the need for SEDL to exert more outreach to publicize its work in this area.

A third issue is the “stand alone” nature of the specialty area. The panel believes that SEDL should integrate language and cultural diversity through all Laboratory projects, services, and internal operations. One suggestion in this regard is to visualize a two-dimensional table with the six goals as columns and Task 7 as a row that cuts across all the goals. [Evaluation would be another row in this table.] Given the nature of the target populations of the region and the nature of the specialty area, someone in a senior leadership position could oversee the proper implementation of this two-dimensional table.

VI. Overall Evaluation of Total Laboratory Programs, Products and Services

Assessing the status and level of success of SEDL’s REL is not an easy task. SEDL is, at the same time, both a veteran organization, established in 1966, and a relatively new one, by virtue of its massive reorganization and change in leadership. In terms of history, SEDL has enjoyed positive relationships with CSSOs in the region, has developed some centerpiece products that are still in use (e.g., the bilingual early childhood curriculum), and has produced one of the most widely used model of school change (i.e., the Concerns-Based Adoption Model developed in part by Shirley Hord who is still at SEDL).

Over time, however, SEDL had become a “tired” organization – somewhat uninspired, not risk-taking, and set in its ways. A staid organizational culture, very difficult to change, was in place.

In 1996, however, the leadership did change and the new CEO set in motion a process of self-assessment that results in major changes in philosophy, structure, operation, staff, and compensation. Thus, in many ways, the REL we visited was a new organization, with many of the start-up problems faced by new RELs with contract awarded during this and the previous contract period. Thus, the assessment of SEDL's successes and accomplishments may better be determined using a template for a new REL than one for a long-established one. In this regard, the leadership should be commended for making such sweeping changes while at the same time managing the workload contained in the current contract, rather than be criticized for not moving fast enough in getting all the work done.

This is not to minimize our concerns, but simply provide a context within which to view and understand them. The REL probably should have been more creative in solving the staff problems in the two vacant management positions. The changes in organizational structure may have been insufficient to allow for creative and productive interchanges among program staff across goal areas. There continues to be a need to diversity funding sources so that work not only can be completed, but expanded. There is a lack of diversity among SEDL staff members that is particularly noteworthy in light of the populations they serve and the programs they offer.

However, there is substantial precedent in the organizational change literature to suggest that it is more difficult to change an existing organization than to create a new one. The SEDL leadership should be commended for attempting such a massive change; by all accounts the benefits to the organization and its clients are being noticed. This is likely to increase substantially in the future.

SEDL's job, as specified in its contract, is to "find, share, and sustain effective solutions for the most urgent problems facing educational systems, practitioners, and decision makers." The primary strategies for fulfilling the letter and spirit of this contractual agreement are "development, dissemination,

training, and technical assistance, supported by evaluation and applied research.” SEDL made a number of major revisions in its contract that delayed the implementation of much of the REL’s work. Hence, most of the work reviewed during this evaluation is “in progress,” having occurred during the past 18 months to two years. Still, it must be emphasized that progress has been made toward goal accomplishment in all goal areas.

VII. Broad Summary of Strengths, Areas for Improvement, and Strategies for Improvement

The following is a summary of SEDL’s strengths.

- It has able and visionary leadership and a supportive Board of Directors.
- It has a talented and dedicated staff.
- It is engaged in important work.
- It is client- and student-centered with a strong service orientation.
- It approaches site work with flexibility and adaptability.
- It has designed and uses an effective field-based developmental model.
- It has an operative, institutionalized quality assurance process.
- It has some nascent programs in its specialty area that may position the Laboratory in the national spotlight if the staff can be mobilized sufficiently.
- It has begun to position itself strongly in certain areas, such as comprehensive school reform and integrating technology in the classroom.

The following is a summary of the panel’s recommendations for improvement.

- The vacant leadership positions in the specialty area and in evaluation must be filled expeditiously, with SEDL staff seeking creative solutions to this staffing problem.
- An organizational structure and, more importantly, an organizational ethos must be created that will move SEDL to be a professional learning community, much as the REL is trying to establish and support in locate sites. In conjunction with this, there must be better utilization of staff

knowledge and expertise across programs, goals, products, and services.

- The specialty area must be more coherent and must be more consciously infused into the overall philosophy and operation of SEDL. Furthermore, the SEDL must do everything within its power to make it synonymous with language and cultural diversity.
- There needs to be more outreach on the regional and national scene. This would include more collaboration with the other regional Laboratories, higher education institutions, and other appropriate educational organizations and agencies.
- There is a need to conduct solid research and sound evaluation that cut across programs, the results of which should be widely disseminated.
- The emphasis on community and teacher development notwithstanding, every effort must be made to truly place students at the heart of SEDL's work with communities and schools. This means "hard data" on student successes as a result of project participation is needed.
- During the next two years, SEDL must seriously address the issue of dissemination, what it means, how it is to be accomplished, and what role SEDL is to play in it. The transition from development to dissemination must be made very soon.